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ILLINOIS CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

September 3, 1970

Closing Address

by

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President

Sixth Illinois Constitutional Convention

Place: Old State Capitol
Springfield, Illinois

Occasion: Final Session
Sixth Illinois Constitutional
Convention

Citizens of Illinois and Fellow Delegates:

On November 5, 1968 citizens of Illinois called a Constitutional Convention by the largest margin ever given any candidate or proposition in our State's history.

On December 8, 1969—in response to this mandate—the Sixth Illinois Constitutional Convention was called to order.

On September 3, 1970 this Convention adjourns sine die.

These have not been easy times in which to write the Constitution of 1970. Between the “alpha” and “omega” of this Convention, both our State and Nation have experienced frustration of spirit, confusion of conscience and division of purpose.

In short, a “national era of friction” has been suspended over this Convention chamber not unlike an earlier era in our history which caused the historical creator of this chamber to remark in this very chamber: “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

While it is easy to stand aside and simply observe society's tensions, it is difficult to enter the arena of conflict where citizens debate solutions to society's problems.

As the late President Theodore Roosevelt said:

“The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood . . . who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

To your credit as delegates to this convention, you have come into the arena to openly debate the issues of our day. You have dared greatly.

Whether the product of our debate results in victory or defeat, only the citizens whose mandate sent us here will determine.

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History reminds us that extinction has claimed many great nations and civilizations which could not meet their challenges and solve their problems. As the Roman historian Livy recorded: "Rome could neither bear its ills nor the remedies that might have cured them."

The question is now whether we will continue our American tradition of curing our ills or whether we will fall by the wayside of history like other great civilizations.

The Sixth Illinois Constitutional Convention is a test in microcosm of our national will to continue as one of history's great nations and civilizations.

Should the endeavors of this Convention fail, radical and revolutionary elements in our society will be encouraged because they know failure of governmental institutions to respond to the wishes of the people breeds discontent and despair, the very catalysts of radical and revolutionary action. Edmund Burke said it very well: "When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle."

Where there is hope, the spirit of the people will be united to resist the forces of hopelessness and destruction in our society. No legal tradition like ours can long succeed unless supported by the confidence of the people in their government.

I believe the 1970 Constitution merits the confidence of the people.

The 1970 Constitution is neither reactionary nor radical. It is balanced.

The 1970 Constitution is neither regressive nor visionary. It is practical.

The fiscal conservative can be confident that the 1970 Constitution embodies reasonable restraints on the taxing and financial indebtedness powers of state and local government.

The humanitarian liberal can be confident that the 1970 Constitution extends and strengthens the rights of all citizens—black and white.

The constitutional purist can be confident that the 1970 Constitution has stricken approximately 4000 words representing impurities of language and anachronisms of the 19th century contained in our old Constitution.

The institutional reformer can be confident that the 1970 Constitution offers streamlined improvements in the structure of state and local government.

The "urbanologist" can be confident that the 1970 Constitution has the most modern and relevant Local Government Article in any state constitution.

The ecologist can be confident that the 1970 Constitution provides structural and procedural vehicles to attack pollution and to preserve our natural resources.

The young can be confident that the 1970 Constitution offers a fair way to extend the voting franchise to those eighteen years of age and older.

The educator and the parent can be confident that the 1970 Constitution proposes substantial improvements in our educational system.

While some would have had this Convention write a constitutional document of ideological perfection, others would have had us simply stamp our endorsement on the status quo. We have pursued neither extreme.

In our task, we have sought to excise Constitutional anachronisms and to excavate the breeding ground for Constitutional evasion which provoked the late Governor Adlai Stevenson to remark:

"In another environment, the energetic ingenuity we have developed here in Illinois to avoid the anachromism of our Constitution might be amusing. But it cannot be amusing when it concerns basic principles of our form of government. A Constitution as Americans look at things is to be respected and obeyed, not evaded and flouted."

Citizens of Illinois should measure the product of our work by these tests:

— Is the Constitution of 1970 superior to the Constitution of 1870?

— Is the Constitution of 1970 relevant to the problems of our State?

By either test, the 1970 Constitution possesses a more efficient and economical governmental structure while strengthening our commitment to the human needs of the people.

The 1870 Constitution addresses a faceless society; the 1970 Constitution, a human society.

Unlike the 1870 Constitution, the 1970 Constitution—balanced and practical—holds out hope to the people of Illinois that their government can be responsive to their problems in the 20th century.

Where there is hope, there is also opportunity. For Illinois, our opportunity is not only to approve a new Constitution but also to accomplish a first in our nation.

For most of American history, State governments have been the preeminent power in our Federal system. Within the last 30 years, however, power has surged in a crescendo from State Capitols to our Nation's Capitol. Should this crescendo continue, State and Local governments will become like pawns on the Federal chessboard.

Illinois has an opportunity to lead other states in correcting the imbalance of governmental power in our Federal system.

On November 5, 1968 the people of Illinois said by almost a three to one margin that constitutional reform is necessary.

On December 15, 1970 the people of Illinois will judge the fruit of our labor to see if we have lived up to their mandate.

We may hope for a favorable judgment:

— if the leaders of our State, public and private, vigorously support the 1970 Constitution;

- if citizens of Illinois are presented with the facts about the advantages of the 1970 Constitution;
- if we as delegates join hands with citizens and leaders from all walks of life in our State in a common effort for the Constitution of 1970.

Let it be our common hope that the election on December 15, 1970 will not be a hitching post to the past, but a stepping stone to the future.

Today, let us take the first step.